

with your neighbours. For 'if there's an accident in your house, neighbours arrive in their shirt-sleeves (to give the modern equivalent), while friends wait to put on their coats'. You must also keep a jag-toothed dog and feed him well. And then be sure to get servants without any children—servants' children are a nuisance. As for your own marriage, marry, about thirty, a girl of twenty; not a widow, so that you can train her properly; and let her be a neighbour's daughter—but keep your eyes open so that you don't suddenly find you have made yourself the village laughing-stock.

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For man can find no prize more worth the winning
 Than a good wife; nor grislier than a bad—
 Some giddy thing, that will roast the best of husbands
 Without a fire into a raw old age.

The good wife has here her word of praise; but it is the bad who makes Hesiod bitterly witty. We may remember Pandora. Again and again in these pages we seem to be listening to the shrewd common sense of Benjamin Franklin or Jeremy Bentham or, still more, of William Cobbett with his *Advice to Young Men*. It is all a little repellent; yet, somehow we go on listening to this sun-burnt wrinkled figure, who seems, as he speaks, to keep shaking a sad and disapproving head at life; for there is a sincerity in this worn face, not altogether unlike Langland's, a quiet enjoyment of his own irony,

a flicker, at
moments, of dry humour in the eyes that
have seen, and
seen through, so much in life. 'If you must go
sailing*, he
says to 'foolish Perses':

If you must turn your feckless heart to trade
By sea, to escape from debt and unlovely
hunger,